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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
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SUBJECT: KINSHASA SITREP 6: CITY QUIET WITH HEAVY MILITARY PRESENCE

REF: KINSHASA 356 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (U) The downtown Gombe district of Kinshasa is calm the morning of March 24. Gunfire and small explosions were heard in the vicinity of the Chancery and USAID offices for nearly an hour beginning at approximately 4:20 a.m., but only occasional bursts of small arms fire since. The area around the South African Ambassador's residence, where Jean-Pierre Bemba remains, is quiet. Several MONUC armored personnel carriers were seen at about 7:00 a.m. traveling from their base a few miles southeast of Gombe into the downtown area.

¶2. (U) EAC convened at 6:30 a.m. The committee agreed to send out an updated warden message urging all AmCits to remain cautious, limit any unnecessary movements, and be aware of possible planned weapons searches by security forces. AmCits will also be advised to Post's authorized departure of family members.

¶3. (U) There are no reports of AmCit casualties. Children of Mission personnel at the American School a few miles west of Gombe, where they have remained since March 22, are returning to the area via armored Embassy vehicles this morning. Other Mission personnel, including local staff, who have remained at the Chancery, JAO complex and USAID offices since March 22 are beginning to return to their residences in transportation organized by the Mission using armored vehicles.

¶4. (U) RSO and DATT conducted an early-morning patrol throughout Gombe and reported a heavy presence of Congolese military and Republican Guard forces on the streets, with several checkpoints established along the main Boulevard de 30 Juin. There was little vehicle traffic and a small number of pedestrians on the roads, but numbers are continuing to grow during the morning. RSO and DATT observed significant damage to buildings and shops along the boulevard due to looting. No bodies were seen in the streets.

¶5. (U) Preliminary information indicates that Kenya Airways, SAA and Ethiopian flights will be landing at Kinshasa's Ndjili International Airport today. Initial reports are that SN Brussels has canceled its flight; we have received no confirmation of the status of that of Air France.

¶6. (U) Influential Catholic Archbishop of Kisangani Laurent Monsengwo, president of the National Catholic Bishops' Conference, called in a March 23 press conference for a dialogue between the Bemba and Kabila camps to end the fighting. He said he regretted the loss of life and violence in Kinshasa, and urged all parties to work together to bring about a lasting peace.

MEECE